MODERNIST QUARTET

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PHILOSOPHERS OF MODERNISM AT HARVARD, CIRCA 1900

WHEN GEORGE SANTAYANA was appointed to the philosophy department at Harvard in 1889, just a year after finishing his doctorate there, he became the junior colleague of William James and Josiah Royce, and the three together, over the next two decades – in relationships supportive, competitive, and critical – collectively defined the shapes and limitations of what would come to be understood as modernism in the United States: its desires and values, its literary, social, and philosophical genesis and ground, and the sometimes stinging antithetical force of its cultural and social commentary. In different ways, Santayana, James, and Royce each addressed the future of philosophy and poetry as if, at the same time, they were addressing the future of society, as if the shape of things to come in some crucial part depended on the way writers and intellectuals conducted themselves. The landmarks of modernism established by the group are easy to identify: James's *The Principles of Psychology* in 1890, a work which among its other accomplishments gave us both the term and the theory of "stream of consciousness"; Santayana's *The Sense of Beauty* in 1896 and his pivotal *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* in 1900; James's *Pragmatism* in 1907; and, finally, in 1913, one year after Harriet Monroe founded *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse,* modernism's inaugurating little magazine, Royce's *The Problem of Christianity.*

If the years between 1890 and 1913 mark the most energetic

period of American philosophical modernism, that same period also represents, as more than one historian of American literature has deceptively implied by word and by silence, the big blank of American poetic history. Bryant died in 1878, Longfellow in 1882, Lowell in 1891, Whittier in 1892, and Holmes in 1894. When we correlate these end-dates with their respective beginnings – Bryant was born in 1794, the other "Fireside" presences early in the nineteenth century – in other words, when we add the fact of biological endurance to the fact of unprecedented popular acceptance, we are pressed to conclude that the dominance of America's Fireside poets, who were published in the later nineteenth century by Houghton Mifflin in "household" editions, is a literary reality of long and oppressive reach. (Imagine, if you can, a "household" edition of *The Cantos*.) The Fireside poets were among the chief cultural powers of our nineteenth century: they stood for poetry. By their lives as well as by their practice as writers they defined, however conservatively, a broad-ranging cultural (educative) function for the man of letters: they translated Homer and Dante; they held chairs in romance languages at Harvard; they edited influential newspapers; they were foreign diplomats; they gave well-noted and well-attended speeches on the controversial affairs of the day. Whitman, a visible dissenter from Fireside forms and morals (though not from its cultural ambition), died in 1892, a year after the publication of the tenth edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Emily Dickinson, another qualified dissenter, died without fame in 1886.

Looking back at the early days of his poetic development, in the first decade of this century, T. S. Eliot reflected on the literal truth of his poetic origins when he said that there was not "a single living poet, in either England or America, then at the height of his powers, whose work was capable of pointing the way to a young poet conscious of the desire for a new idiom." Long after the fact, Eliot was rationalizing his interests in continental literatures and in older periods of English literature. (American literary history would, however, eventually exact its revenge: Eliot would become the high

modernist representative of the traditional New England poets.) Wallace Stevens added a concurring and decadent note to Eliot's testimony when he wrote that when he was a student at Harvard, "it was commonplace to say that all the poetry had been written and all the paintings painted." Feeling the familiar romantic burden, the embarrassment of tradition, Stevens, after settling himself economically, moved into self-consciously avant-garde styles in an effort to accentuate his difference and originality. But, like Eliot, he was also decisively marked by his American poetic inheritance – hence his self-definition in "The Comedian as the Letter C" as a poet of "disguised *pronunciamento,*" a writer of "anecdotes" which he characterized as doctrinal, not in form (no Longfellow or Bryant he), but in intention: Stevens as closet Fireside poet, as it were. On the other hand, Robert Frost, who was never embarrassed by the American literary heritage of popular poetry, paid open tribute to his Fireside predecessor, Longfellow, when he titled his first volume *A Boy's Will.*

E. A. Robinson, Stevens, and Frost were all "special" (nondegree candidate) students at Harvard in the period in question: Robinson from 1891 to 1893, Frost from 1897 to 1899, Stevens from 1897 to 1900. Eliot, from 1906 to 1914, was the genuine article at Harvard, taking a B.A. in 1910, an M.A. in 1911, and doing advanced work for the Ph.D. in languages and philosophy before settling in London in 1914, dissertation completed but, by choice, no Ph.D. in hand. So the apprenticeship of what we know as modern American poetry coincides both with the big blank of American poetic history and the big bang of modernist American philosophy. And the site of emerging modernist poetic idioms and of an authoritative philosophical discourse was Cambridge, Massachusetts, at the turn of the twentieth century. Both in personal ways and in the prescribed academic fashion, Robinson, Frost, Stevens, Eliot, and Radcliffe's modernist, Gertrude Stein, encountered the Harvard philosophers. In the conventional sense of what we mean by the terms, these philosophers were "influences" and "sources." Stevens knew Santayana personally, read and was moved to a lifetime of meditation by

Interpretations of Poetry and Religion; Frost taught the shorter version of James's *Principles;* Eliot took a class with Royce. It is not hard to trace links between sentences in Santayana and James and specific poems and phrases in Stevens, Frost, and Eliot. But those are the footnotes to the text of modern American poetic history. The philosophical works written in Cambridge in the last decade of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth, despite the attitude of traditional literary history, are not background. As more expansive, detailed, and precise expressions of modernist thought than anything written in prose by any of the important American poets, either in that period or thereafter, the key works of Santayana, James, and Royce are themselves collaborative modernist texts, the original metapoetic idiom of the youth of Eliot, Frost, and Stevens – both expressions and criticisms of the ideologies of modernism before the fact.

George Santayana (1863–1952), who was born in Spain and brought by his father to the United States in 1872, will be recalled, if by nothing else, as the author of the maxim that those who will not remember the past are condemned to repeat it; as the archetypal fallen Roman Catholic who is reported to have said that there is no God and the Blessed Virgin Mary is His mother; and, by readers of Wallace Stevens, as the philosopher evoked in Stevens's moving late poem "To an Old Philosopher in Rome," who in fact died in Rome, in a convent. This trivia is relevant to the deeper drifts of Santayana's writing (and to the course of modernism), though it might be impossible to see such relevance in his major publication of 1896, *The Sense of Beauty,* a treatise on aesthetics which can stand as a miniature of the nineteenth-century preoccupation (via Kant and Schiller) with beauty in isolation from knowledge, use, and morality. Autonomous beauty: not an elusive and ascetic spirituality, but a special kind of "play" that certifies our final achievement of human-

ity: our civilization, our happiness, and (key word for aesthetic idealists) our "freedom" from all necessities imposed upon us from outside. Aesthetic play in the utopian elaboration of aesthetics developed in the 1950s and 1960s by Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse would nevertheless be sublimely useful: it would abolish the joyless grind known as *work* in the capitalist system and become the sign of a race which does, in Santayana's anticipation of the happy talk of the new left, "spontaneously whatever conduces to its welfare," and which lives "safely and prosperously without external stimulus or restraint." And not only would nature be overcome, in the first act of this aesthetic apocalypse, but so would consumer capitalism – the economy, ethics, and culture of the commodity. Eventually, we would win our freedom from capitalist society, which has displaced nature as the iron law of our destiny. Until the revolution, however, we will have to comfort ourselves with the foreplesure provided by proleptic hints of radical social transformation in the beauties of nature and the plastic arts, which (in Santayana's carefully chosen words – Marcuse could not have said it more precisely) "are not consumed by being enjoyed."

The intriguing sense of Santayana's "sense of beauty" lies in its evasion of two powerful trivializations of the literary experience at the end of the nineteenth century, two kinds of aestheticist extremity which signaled two kinds of alienation from the bourgeois life: on our side of the Atlantic, thanks to the genteel cultural critics, the vaporization, in the name of Keats (of all writers) of the aesthetic into the ascetic; on the other side, and also in the name of Keats – Pater's Keats – the conversion of the aesthetic into private sensuous delight, the revelry of sensation cherished in a revery locked behind the thick walls of personality. For Santayana, aesthetic pleasure is a different kind of pleasure, and its difference lies in its teasing invitation to the social being that Pater and genteel America had deliberately turned their backs on. Aesthetic pleasure for Santayana is neither an "impression" imprisoned in an isolated subject, nor a release into the stratosphere of disembodied souls. It is instead the

sort of pleasure that is anchored in the immediacy and inviolable integrity of perception.

What Santayana calls the "objectification" of perception is the creation of that special sort of literary effect that a self-conscious modernist poetics would shortly call the "image," and in Santayana it is clear, as it rarely is in the celebrated modernist theorists who followed him, that the image is not only a form of perception but also a form of expression which integrates feeling and object in a public medium. As perception caught and crystallized in language, the image *is* the sense of beauty and it ought not to be an inducement to retreat into an incommunicable inwardness. By virtue of its fluidity, as a shuttle between, and binder of, subject and object, Santayana's "sense of beauty" becomes a necessary condition for collective recovery of our sensuous environment, collective integration of feeling and object: community formed by and for the pleasures of the percept; a community of hedonists, but a community. Santayana cannot, under any circumstances, be charged with having a radical social conscience, but neither can he be charged with the onanism of Pateresque aestheticism.

Santayana's thinking from *The Sense of Beauty* to the later chapters of *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* prefigures the primary conflict inside poetic modernism between what would be called "imagism," the dream of the percept, and the sustained effort of a number of American poetic modernists to meet the challenge of a post-Miltonic long poem. In the arc of Wallace Stevens's career, it is the long movement between the early modernist perceptual "minutiae" of *Harmonium* and his "grand poem" of the 1940s, *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction*. Similarly, the tendency of *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* is to argue from isolate sensibility to community, from poems as aids to perception to poems as aids to connection, from the singular image and its support in the lonely imagination to the long poem and its support in a community of interpreters, from a poetry of presence, a poetry of the present tense (Keatsian apotheosis), to a

poetics of history and destiny – a poetry of the long shadow and the act whose fruit is futurity.

In the final chapter of *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion,* Santayana moves against the personal retreat inherent in conventional turn-of-the-century Pateresque hedonism as well as the Dionysian community that would be celebrated by the philosophers of the New Left in the 1960s. He begins with oppositions that will soon become clichés in modernist theory, and which had already appeared in American genteel aestheticism: verse is to prose as song is to speech as "jewels" are to "clay"; he begins, in other words, by assenting to the formalist credo that poetry, like stained glass, "arrests attention in its own intricacies" – a double-edged, yearning metaphor that asserts not only the intrinsic nature of aesthetic value but also, in its insistence on arrested attention, holds out the promise of rapturous fulfillment in complete rest, the extinguishing of will and our tomblike encasement (in the pretty rooms of sonnets) from history's world of chronicle and power. When sound and rhythm, perfectly "measured" and therefore distanced from the vernacular voice, produce the stained-glass effect, we are in the presence of a language "redolent" of "objectless passion" indistinguishable from the "sensation of movement and sensuous richness of the lines." Santayana's diction, deliberately overwrought, suggests something of his fin-de-siècle context: poetry in full retreat from the object is free-floating feeling, passion without reference, an exotic flower whose exhalations will satisfy what the chilling prose of thought and reference apparently threaten – the "glow of sense" and the thrills thereof. Santayana's ironic perspective both summarizes and judges (by half scorning) the desire to leave the world unseen and to fade far away to a warm south of orgiastic sensuousness. He says, in so many words, that the idolatry of Keats, whether Pateresque or genteel, is a "tedious vacuity"; it is "unworthy of a mature mind"; it belongs to the "apprenticeship of genius."

Stevens's imagination, in "Sunday Morning," of a socialized hedo-

nist sensibility (a "ring of men," chanting in orgy), his community of muscular ("supple and turbulent") nontubercular Keatsian males, is a nice counterpoint to the wispy and wimpy genteel recreation of Keats and to the insipidness of a genteel Christianity that can come only in dreams and in silent shadows. But the vision of community in "Sunday Morning" can be taken seriously only as the desperation of the poet who, like so many high modernists, often felt the need to turn back the clock. The comical impotence of Stevens's Dionysian fantasy of community in the seventh section of "Sunday Morning" is underscored by its exclusive male membership and by its nostalgia for pastoral enclosure. But in such pathos lies another, less conventional critical tale which the social history that surrounded the Harvard of Santayana and Stevens helps us to read by implicitly posing this question for the hedonists of modernist poetics, thereby forcing that poetics to show its rhetorical hand: if it is true that the economically shielded of upper-middle to upper-class background (including their intellectuals) in the youth of Stevens felt themselves distanced from their bodies – neurasthenia in the Harvard days of Stevens, Frost, and Eliot was a privileged illness – then it is also the case that hedonist poetics produces a cult poetry for the successful bourgeois victims of capitalism, that hedonist poetics (despite its romantic heritage) is conceived, not in radical Wordsworthian literary hopes, so that poets could speak to ordinary people, but so that the socially and culturally extraordinary could *in imagination* get physical, become ordinary and ignorant, mating their lives (in Stevens's phrase) with the sensual, pearly spouse, while in reality, nine to five, continuing to serve and enhance the society that had made them ill in the first place.

The privileged implied reader of early modernist literature is not among the exemplary heroes of that literature, and the ordinary people who are often celebrated in modernist texts do not read, or maybe even need, modernist literature. To get in touch with their bodies was not exactly the desire of the immigrants who flooded this country from southern Europe at the turn of the century when

Santayana was publishing *The Sense of Beauty* and *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion.* These people, who became the backbone of our working class – among other things, they dug the subway tunnels of New York – were all too immediately touched by experience; on the parched terrain of neofeudal southern Italy, where many of them were born, they had already experienced the discomforts of the sun; they had long before, and very unhappily, mated with the sensual, pearly spouse. (Or, as Stevens put it in a telling moment of sentimentality, after an especially gruelling period at the office – "I have worked like an Italian.") The ideological irony of early modern American poetry (Frost and Robinson are important exceptions) is that its pervasive sentiment for ignorance and the ignorant can be expressed only by Stevens's "sleight-of-hand man" – the self-conscious coterie poet of dense and difficult substance who pitches his language to those with the most patient critical attention. Intensity and purity of perceptual pleasure is one goal of modernist poetics; the difficult, wistful dream of perception and the absence of pleasure is often its reality.

Wallace Stevens's later career raises other basic questions about the ideology of Santayana's modernism: What shall we do after our supple bodies become brittle? How shall we chant our boisterous devotion to the sun when the pharynx goes bad? And how does a hedonist handle the boredom of repetitious sensation? These are the sorts of questions that Yvor Winters would later raise about modernism in a landmark essay on Stevens. In a letter both amusing and moving, written in his late sixties, Stevens in effect confirmed Winters when he said this: "What I want more than anything else in music, painting and poetry, in life and in belief is the thrill that I experienced once in all the things that no longer thrill me at all. I am like a man in a grocery store that is sick and tired of raisins and oyster crackers and who is nevertheless overwhelmed by appetite."

Santayana, who had more sympathy than Winters for modernist dilemmas, in effect read the hedonist impulse in modern poetry not as it is usually read, as irresponsible decadence, but as first-stage

yearning – a critical impulse for social change from within dominant social groups: the cultivation of the senses as an effort to return to immediate experience, from which the economically privileged have been alienated. Alienation, as the condition generated by the economic mode of production that necessarily displaces the condition of nature, is at once the price of our freedom from nature's force and the code term of a desire to pierce the veils of capitalist social torpor and to return to more primal contact with the natural sources of being.

In an allusive and revisionary play on Aristotle's poetics, Santayana says that poetry "in its primary substance and texture" is "more philosophical than prose because it is nearer to our immediate experience," from which we have been exiled by a ruthless economics of perception. In a rhetorical maneuver of some complexity, Santayana brings the authority of Aristotle, who had nothing good to say about immediate experience, against the culture of capitalism, about which Aristotle could not have had anything to say. Santayana would hook his kind of aestheticism into classical authority in order to quarantine the era of capitalism as some strange disease in the history of Western society, a historical deviation from the social norm, not the next scene in a teleological drama whose last act would see the delivered promise of socialism. Aestheticism so positioned by Santayana becomes mainstream social criticism, not marginal bohemian antithesis to the social center. Santayana conceives the hedonist pleasures of perception and their literary authority and vehicle, the image, as the incipient human protest of the ages against the economic perversion of his time. He is, in this effort, a later representative of the humanist anticapitalism mounted in the English tradition beginning with Burke and Coleridge, and not a closet Marxist. The judgments on perception that he cites – unnecessary, impractical, a waste of labor – and the correlative counterjudgments on conception – preeminently useful, economical – are penetrations into the often socially rarefied realms of epistemology and literary theory of the culture of capital. Santayana's epithets, by

1900, are on the way to becoming the crucial critical conventions of T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, and the New Critics. Their occurrence in his writing is all the more interesting for being casual, for in their casualness they represent an ever more central American literary preoccupation with the cultural and economic object of the long-established social criticism in the English literary tradition.

What is not part of Santayana's literary periphery and its ambience of bohemianism and alienation – the mostly dull sword of modern poetry's antisocial reflex – is his historically surprising criticism of perceptualist aesthetic more than a decade before Pound's imagist crusade and the work of Hulme. Alongside Santayana's criticism of modernism, Winters's later judgments – for all their justice – sound imposed from outside and out of touch with the context of social issues within which modernist hedonism grew and became an attractive, therapeutic alternative for all manner of neurasthenics (Prufrock is their literary avatar) who, as economically fortunate reapers of the fruits of working-class labor, became the spiritual victims of capitalism. Against Winters's icier Platonism, Santayana would build reason upon sensuousness because he thought that in the sensuous experience mediated by the measured phonetic and rhythmic microlevels of poetry – the *order* of sound and rhythm – we are given our initial glimpses of the "measure" that may come to be at the macrolevel of poetry's social referent.

But if it is the image which is the authoritative language of immediacy, the image which destroys the bridges of conventional action by making us "halt at the sensation" – for which the world of business, in its preconsumer phase, has no use – if it is the image which restores the intimacy of idea and emotion, thereby unifying a sundered sensibility and reactivating (Coleridge's great hope) the whole soul of man; if the image can do all of this, not engage, not revise, nor in any way transform the horrors of business to which it is a response, but rather take us outside, give us new consciousness without disturbing the world of the old (we now recognize these goals as the aims of early modernist aesthetics), then there is some-

thing fundamentally empty about the social goals of literary modernism. Santayana knew this. Perceptual poetry may instigate an imaginative recovery of primitive innocence and vitality for the socially and culturally privileged, but in the same act, he thought, it also returns them to the confusions of nature. "If the function of poetry . . . did not go beyond this recovery of sensuous and imaginative freedom," then, Santayana writes, "poetry would deserve the judgment of Plato." Poets at best could take their place with gourmet cooks, high-priced hair stylists, florists, and other decorators of the economically fortunate. The poetry of "sensation and impulse," which "merely tickles the brain, like liquor, and plays upon our random imaginative lusts," is castigated as "irrational" by Santayana not because it appeals per se to the senses (Santayana, no champion of the sexy pleasures of the text, was also no prude). Nor is such poetry irrational simply because it excites what he calls "imaginative lusts" – Santayana would recuperate lust as desire – but because the lust that is aroused is a form of masturbation: random, disconnected, bound by private self-delight. Part of no world of others, it is merely isolated and a sin against community.

The word that Santayana needs to complete his assault on modernism was supplied much later by Georg Lukács, who described the vast and luxuriant particularity of James Joyce's *Ulysses* as "abstract." Leopold Bloom's iridescent and unforgettable "impressions" (in Pater's sense) are placed by Joyce against the background of a Dublin in relation to which they remain fundamentally alien: they have no past and no future, no time to them; they exist in a discontinuous, autonomous present. They are fragments calling for a historical consciousness of totality to make sense of them. Like the abstract alienation Lukács finds in Kafka, the abstract impressionism of Joyce is static. It refers us to a frozen, passive, and essentialized world of "inner" human nature that lies on the other side of history and will. The abstractions of Joyce and Kafka, argues Lukács, produce narratives not of specific social fate but of a universal *condition humain*. In

other words, these are writers who appear to be incapable of political narrative because they cannot imagine social transformation.

With its basis in a Marxist theory of history, the political intention of Lukács's criticism of modernism is specific and reasonably clear. If Santayana's criticism is politically motivated (he would have been horrified to hear of it), then it is a criticism on behalf of a politics neither especially clear nor specific in his writing at the turn of the century. The common ground of Lukács (who shares much with the impatient Winters on modernism) and Santayana lies in the meaning they give to the charge that modernism encourages trivial writing – "pictures" rather than "stories": human reality as bits and pieces of things eternally present. Santayana's antidote is what he calls the philosophical poem, the kind of poem (his major examples are Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe) that not only contemplates "all things in their order and worth" and every single thing "in light of the whole," but in so contemplating would *speak for* the totality envisioned – in order, as it were, to urge it into being. Unlike Lukács, Santayana seems capable of imagining the possibility of a specifically modernist equivalent to the classic, philosophical poem – a poetry that would not negate the modernist tendency to root unity in the fragment, but would subordinate image and character to their "effects and causes," their context and condition, to the "*total movement* and meaning of the scene" (the very sort of "poetry" that would be written by Dreiser in *Sister Carrie,* Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby,* Dos Passos in *USA,* and Faulkner in *Absalom, Absalom!).* Santayana's antidote would not do away with the phenomenological fullness and particularity of image and character that Lukács finds in Joyce, because (and this is only hinted at in Santayana) the high cultural nexus of any modernist long poem – weightlessness, neurasthenia, banality, and alienation – demands an anchoring fiction of sensuous presence as its crucial point of departure. Sensuous lyric presence in modernism becomes, or would become, a mechanism or rhetoric on behalf of totality and the larger

narrative vision – a theory, a supreme fiction – that any philosophical poetry, whether Dante's or Ezra Pound's, aims for.

Not the image, not character, and not the visible landscape, but the double landscape of nature and history is what Santayana means by "context." Poetries of the image and narratives of character, unlike *The Odyssey,* cannot set perception and character on wide seas, and for that reason their ultimate distinction is measured and deflated by the puny diameters of their respective worlds. The modernist poet of philosophical and historical ambition will therefore need to revivify, in his search for relevance, what Santayana calls the topographical sense. His writing will need to "swarm with proper names and allusions to history and fable" – and we can mark this classical desire in *The Cantos, The Waste Land, The Bridge,* and *Paterson.* But the topographical sense is of little moment unless the passions of characters so "placed" are linked with their "correlative object" (Santayana's phrase, his gift to Eliot), the dramatic plot that would give narrative propulsion to historical panorama: movement with direction, movement with a past, present, and future. When disjoined from the narrative sense, the topographical sense in Pound and Hart Crane will give the feeling of history but not its directed movement: impressions and images writ large, as Pound writes them, remain, as Pound admitted at the end ("it will not cohere") images and impressions – collocations, not order, not story. The "experience imagined," says Santayana, in a passage that epitomizes the social desire of high modernist poetics, "should be conceived as a destiny, governed by principles, and issuing in the discipline and enlightenment of the will. In this way alone can poetry become interpretation of life and not merely an irrelevant excursion into the realm of fancy, multiplying our images without purpose, and distracting us from our business without spiritual gain." What he calls "significant imagination" and "relevant fiction" are an imagination and a fiction that would move continuously from the purity of the image and the lyricism of character to the poetry which disciplines and enlightens the will; from Odysseus passive, weeping alone on

the shore of Calypso's dreamy island to Odysseus fully energized and engaged, moving again in the historical world, killing the suitors, reclaiming his home.

Not long after the publication of *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion,* William James (1842–1910) set down his reaction: "how fantastic a philosophy! – as if the 'world of values' *were* independent of existence. . . . Always things burst by the growing content of experience. Dramatic unity; laws of versification; ecclesiastical systems; scholastic doctrines. Bah! Give me Walt Whitman and Browning ten times over. . . . The barbarians are in the line of mental growth." Santayana would not have been surprised; he'd been told earlier by James: "What a curse philosophy would be, if we couldn't forget all about it!" James, who saw himself as "unfit to be a philosopher" because at bottom he "hated philosophy," who was never shaken in his conviction "that it is better to *be* than define your being," and whose adult life was scarred by neurasthenia and "the sense of the hollowness and unreality that goes with it," was Santayana's generous-spirited philosophical antithesis. In another response to Santayana's book, he said: "I now understand Santayana, the man. I never understood him before. But what a perfection of rottenness in a philosophy! I don't think I ever knew the anti-realistic view to be propounded with so impudently superior an air. It is refreshing to see a representative of moribund Latinity rise up and administer such reproof to us barbarians in the hour of our triumph."

Santayana's perfection of rottenness lay for James in his "pessimistic platonism." Santayana's world of values seemed to James not only independent of existence; it could claim no metaphysical authority in the classic Greek manner. The world of classical values – order, beauty, wholeness, and truth rational, truth universal, truth binding – is what we crave, not what is. This world of values is the

world we give ourselves as fiction; it is the gift of imagination, Santayana's imperial faculty that crosses over, contaminates, and controls even our "understanding," which is no more than an "applicable fiction, a kind of wit with a practical use." It was this last sort of corrosive distinction (between applicable and inapplicable fictions) which led Frost to dismiss Santayana, saying that he believed only in illusions, true ones and false ones, and which led Stevens to celebrate him for his consistent elegance of irony that found the real both inadequate to our needs and yet the constant and necessary corrector and deflator of our visionary projections. Santayana would tell James that they were closer than he, James, would allow, and Santayana's pragmatic claim for our understanding is a compelling case in point.

But James thought that the key essay in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* was "The Poetry of Barbarism" and that it told another, deeper truth about Santayana's attitudes. Whitman was the poet of healthy-mindedness: James liked nothing better than to weave quotations from *Leaves of Grass* into his essays, especially in his later work, during his overt political phase. For Santayana, however, Whitman was the exemplary type of the barbarian, a poet of "shreds and patches," with "no total vision, no grasp of the whole reality," "no capacity for a sane and steady idealization," no grasp (unlike Dante) of "beauty, order and perfection" – a writer who made no attempt "to seize the eternal morphology of reality." In his "red-hot irrationality," he instead heaped up an "indiscriminate wealth of images." A poet of the most primitive type of perception, a poet of perception in and for itself, Whitman could not subordinate image to conception: for him, "surface is absolutely all and the underlying structure is without interest." Santayana's sharpest phrases for Whitman describe him as a poet of "images without structure," a poet of sensuous immediacy, who was therefore – his barbarism is its literary expression – also the poet of "absolute democracy," or liberalism at its antinomian edge.

The unsubordinated image that refuses to take its place in reason's

organized hierarchy of conception is a political sign that Santayana, with Old World contempt, and James, with American enthusiasm, knew how to read. The unsubordinated image, contra the tradition of philosophy as Santayana knew it, is the very token of being, not the definition of being; the image so unsubordinated, and insubordinate, is the antithesis of structure: it bursts through unities of all kinds because unities are nothing but attempts, James thought, to impose artificially and imperiously – "abstractly," to use one of his key words – out of the desire to dominate. Unities, whether of drama or versification; systems, whether ecclesiastical or other; and doctrines, whether literary, scholastic, or political, all are expressions of impulses that would control by making uniform the variegated world of autonomous individuals, that would destroy individuality, personal and national, by trimming, fitting, and normalizing autonomous individuality, making the world safe for structure (mine, not yours; ours, not theirs). Santayana was a moribund Latin, rotten to the core, because, unable any longer to believe that there was an eternal morphology of the real, he cultivated *fictions* of eternal morphology. James, for whom the metaphysical argument over structure was intellectually and existentially empty, saw structure in pragmatic light as political instrument and force: "The bigger the unit you deal with, the hollower, the more brutal, the more mendacious is the life displayed. So I am against all big organizations as such, national ones first and foremost. . . . System, as such, does violence whenever it lays its hands upon us. The best Commonwealth is the one that most cherishes the men who represent the residual interests, the one that leaves the largest scope to their peculiarities."

James's pragmatist conflict with Santayana's moribund Latinity constitutes an American counterpart and prefiguring of the Lukács and Bloch debate over modernism. Lukács would, without knowing it, replay Santayana's metaphors of surface and deep structure in his excoriation of expressionistic montage, which presents the surface of life "immediately," and therefore as "opaque, fragmentary, chaotic,